

CABARET: COSTUME DESIGN

Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael O'Hara", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the requirements for the Honors College, this thesis chronicles my work as the costume Designer for the Department of Theatre and Dance's main stage production of *Cabaret* in the spring of 2006. I begin with a brief synopsis of the musical play, then detail the concepts that guided the design process, summarize the historical research that grounded my work, and then move to the design itself. I begin with an overview of the design as a whole and then detail the individual designs for the major characters. I conclude with an assessment of my experiences and my work, which then follows in the appendix to this text.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Kay Bayliss who not only acted as my co-designer, but as my mentor.

Thanks also to Hyun-Sook Kim and Kip Shawger.

Thanks especially to Bill Jenkins and the entire cast, crew, and design team of *Cabaret* for creating such a wonderful show.

Thanks to Dr. Michael O'Hara for acting as my advisor.

SYNOPSIS

A young American writer, Clifford Bradshaw, arrives in Berlin on New Year's Eve of 1929 seeking inspiration for his work. He quickly befriends a young German man on the train, Ernst Ludwig, who recommends a place to stay and a night's entertainment. Cliff takes his advice and moves into an apartment building that Frau Schneider, a kindly spinster, owns. There he also meets Herr Schultz, a Jewish fruit shop owner, and Fraulein Kost, a prostitute. Despite initial resistance, Cliff decides to visit the Kit Kat Klub, another one of Ernst's recommendations. There he meets and becomes infatuated with the British star of the show, Sally Bowles.

The next day Sally shows up unannounced at his apartment in need of a place to stay. The play continues following their relationship, where Sally eventually discovers that she's pregnant. Despite being a free spirit, she seems to settle down to the idea of a family until Cliff wants her to move back to America with him. Paralleling this is the love story between Shultz and Schneider. Things seem to be going well with them as well, until their engagement party is disrupted by a show of Nazi support and Schneider is left too scared to continue. In the end, because of the obvious moral decay of the city and its people Cliff decides to leave Berlin without Sally, who underwent an abortion and has gone back to work at the club. He's left with the inescapable memories of his stay in Berlin and the knowledge at the end of what comes to pass in Germany.

CONCEPT

From the beginning, our production team decided to view *Cabaret* as a memory play, looking at the story through Cliff's eyes. His memories conjure up the stage and the characters, so the audience sees the world the way Cliff did. The portrayal of emotions through the costumes became exceedingly important because Cliff's emotional memories override what may have actually happened. We therefore decided to divide the play into two worlds; the Kit Kat Klub and the real world. The Klub became a dream-like world shut off from the outside. As the Emcee states; "We have no troubles here. Here life is beautiful." It isn't until the end when politics and problems finally permeate that dream. The real world of Berlin, of course, is full of issues from the beginning. Every character interacts with these problems a different way by ignoring, fighting, or even accepting them, but they all have their dream worlds to escape to. Some dreams are doomed to collapse because they are built on the concept of decadence and gluttony, while others simply can't survive the world that is crumbling around them. By the end, both worlds are reaching inevitable destruction, and Cliff is left regretting that he escaped only to see his friends fall with those worlds. It is this final memory that haunts him the most.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

Because the script is so explicit about the location and time period, specific research into the style of clothing was necessary. Even though the costumes were deeply affected by Cliff's memory and emotions, he still existed in that particular time and place. We began with the world as he really experienced it and applied his "memory effect" later. Primary sources for historical information included Kathleen La Barre's reference books, *Nazi Chic?*, and paintings by German artists famous in the thirties, such as George Grosz, Otto Dix, and Egon Schiele. Without knowledge of the reality Cliff existed in, we cannot know how it was adjusted. I not only researched images of clothing, but also took a course specifically on the Holocaust to help me understand its effects on that time. Of course, most design choices came from my research on the clothing that people wore in Germany in the 1930s.

It was around this time that the ideal image of a woman was changing. The boyish, free figure was giving way to that of a wholesome girl next door. This transitional period allowed me to draw upon a mixture of styles that were tailored to each character. Some found themselves trapped in the way their world once was, while others fought to push forward. It was also around this time that a major turn around in Germany's fashion decline was occurring. The simple, modest dresses that Germany was often ridiculed for in France were replaced by extravagant and decadent pieces. They wanted to show that they were once again a strong world power in all areas. Once the war began, shortages caused it to all fall apart and women were left hiding their last fur in secret compartments to avoid having it confiscated. But, this downfall had only just begun when the story takes place. Berlin was at its peak of opulence, and could only go down from there.

OVERALL COSTUME DESIGN

My focus of the show was to create the real world of Berlin. The costumes maintained a historical approach while at the same time reflected the inner journeys of each character. By the end, all of the characters, except for the Emcee, have faded. The final scene was played completely in grey tones, the only color coming from the Emcee's red bowtie. Inspiration came from an art piece by a holocaust survivor, shown on page thirteen. Each character had their own individual progression of color throughout the show, but they were all just as degraded by the end. It becomes Cliff's final, haunting memory. He knows what will happen to them in the end, and is left regretting the fact that he ran away from it all.

Within the world of Berlin, the characters were again divided, this time by their ambitions. The characters striving for a New Germany, mainly those in support of the Nazi party, were clothed in cooler tones reminiscent of military colors. The other characters, either against the change or persecuted, were in warmer tones to contrast.

Using all of these concepts, I began to do specific research on each character. After a presentation of ideas to the director, they were formed into sketches and eventually formal renderings. The next step was to sit down with the costume shop manager (my co-designer in this case) and talk about the actual process of building them. Taking the information discussed there, I went out to begin buying fabric. From there, the construction process began. Of course, not everything goes as planned. During first dress rehearsal we realized that Sally's major dress had been redesigned too many times from the original and had lost its impact on stage. So, the morning after we began with a new design which successfully achieved the effect we were after.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER DESIGN

Clifford Bradshaw (p.21)

We decided that since Cliff was reliving the story from a single moment in time, that his costume would remain the same throughout the show. He wore a muted brown suit, tainted but still warm. I also provided him with a number of layers to allow for an easy change in style. This allowed him to remain on-stage throughout the entire production, observing if not interacting. His memories couldn't exist without him.

Sally Bowles (p.14-17)

Sally was the main character that could float between the world of the Kit Kat Klub and that of Berlin. It was in the Klub that Cliff meets her, so her magic is carried with her even outside of it. She grows more real once Cliff discovers her pregnancy and they begin to plan a real life, but still falls back into the dream world from time to time. Her overall color scheme revolved around jewel tones. She had the vibrancy of the Cabaret without feeling gaudy or overdone. Even Sally fades in the end when she has the abortion. Her final dress is worn down and stripped of color. In order to survive that way, she has to lock herself up in the dream world and leave Cliff behind. Sally is one of the characters that can't let go of the past and her form of clothing reflects that. All of the pieces are reminiscent of the 1920s boyish form. She yearns to be a free spirit, the ultimate female empowerment of that time.

Fraulein Schneider (p.18-19)

Schneider's color story carries her through a growing warmth in conjunction with her relationship to Herr Schultz, which she loses when the engagement fails. When she enters the fruit shop at the beginning of Act 2 to break the news to Schultz, she already appears worn down. Her

lines, of course, reflect what a modest, older woman would have worn. Her day dresses are practical and unadorned. The only reflection of opulence is in the dress she wears to the engagement party; a light, flowing frock with a simple strand of pearls. She is the voice of reason for Cliff.

Herr Schultz (p.22)

Schultz follows the same form as Schneider. His warmth ebbs and flows with their relationship. He, too, is practical in his attire, wearing simple suits and the occasional sweater vest. The fit of the clothing was the most important part, aiding in the illusion of age.

Fraulein Kost (p.20)

Her character remains fairly stable throughout the play, using the changing world to her advantage. She is one of the advocates of change in Berlin, so her colors reflect the military scheme. Her two outfits are a dusty blue and green. Even though she is a prostitute by trade, she knows how to use her figure rather than skin to look attractive. Too much skin in this time would have been not only distracting, but a direct fight against the current that Kost seems to encourage.

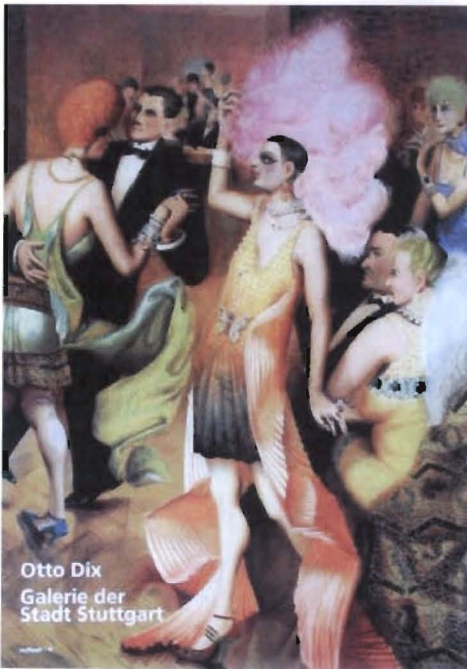
Ernst Ludwig (p.22)

Ernst is the embodiment of the new Germany movement. He sports well fitted, highly tailored suits in strong, cool colors. The change in style with the birth of the 1930s came easily for him. He is the clean cut, confident, ideal German young man. Cliff saw no reason to not trust him initially and neither should the audience. His clothing gains strength over time along with him.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Cabaret has been the most successful and educational production I have had the opportunity to work on. All of the pieces of design came together in the end with the actors on stage to create a wonderful piece. Through my in-depth research of the time period I learned more than I could have ever hoped to. I gained a strong understanding not only of the fashion, but of Germany itself during that era. The knowledge and the experiences I gained from this will easily carry over to other shows. It was the first large-scale musical that provided me a chance to focus all of my energy on costumes. The chance to work side-by-side with Kay and have a non-student director was exceptionally educational. This experience is something that I can carry on not only in my portfolio, but as I graduate and go on to graduate school and, someday, a professional career.

REFERENCE IMAGES



George Grosz



Egon Schiele



Gifts That "Let Us Be Gay" in Our Leisure Hours

A-1234 This lustrous Alençon pattern lace-trimmed suit is fashioned along the newest lines, with flowing sleeves, broad neckline, low flare and knee length. In pink or turquoise. Sizes 14, small, medium. \$35.00.

B-1235 This hand-embroidered and lace-trimmed suit is fashioned along the newest lines, with flowing sleeves, broad neckline, low flare and knee length. In pink or turquoise. Sizes 14, small, medium. \$35.00.

afternoon & sports modes



"*Waves of the green*" is the first thing I noticed the green of this little party suit. It is so very attractive. On the left an afternoon ensemble shows a color that, just as slightly flared, goes to the top. The top of the large patterned skirt is a pretty, spaced curve of the line. The first night-like line, the shape of a good manner. It is not such very flowing, just like which continues to points of the back line.

Complete look up with undergarments, see in First, one in Second, of these designs, and in last on page pattern. Full particulars on page 174.





RENDERINGS

CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 1 Sc 1



Sally Bowles
Act 1 Sc 4/5

CABARET



CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 2 Sc 4



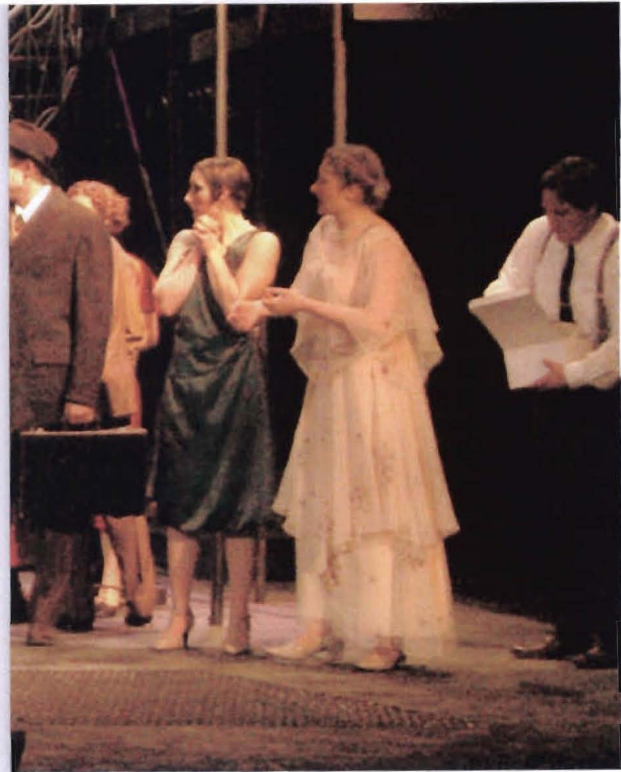
CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 1 Sc 10



CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 1 Sc 13



CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 1 Sc 6

*for
the
day*

CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 2 Sc 5



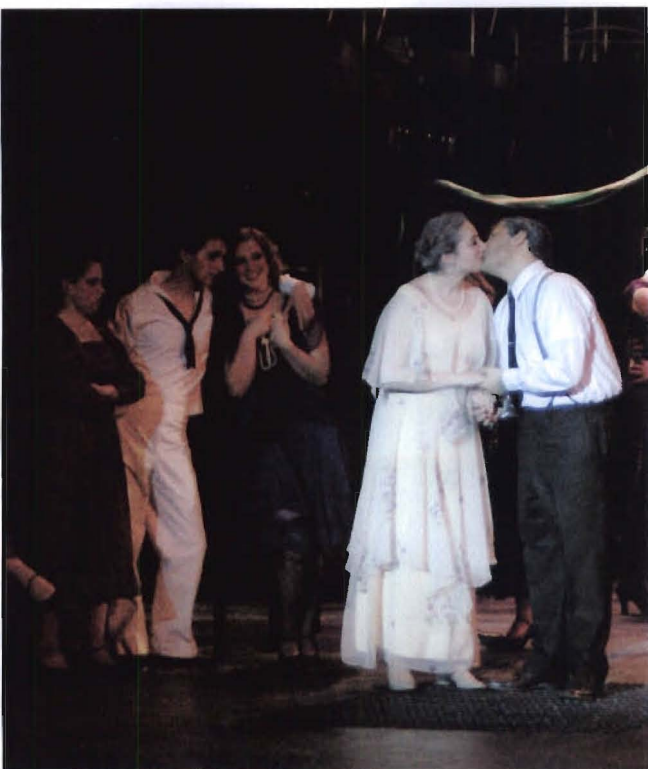
CABARET



Sally Bowles
Act 2 Sc 5



Fraulein Schneider
Act 1 Sc 8



CABARET

*Nina
Klein
10/04*



CABARET

*Nina
Klein
10/04*

Fraulein Schneider
Act 2 Sc 2



CABARET



Fraulein Kost



CABARET

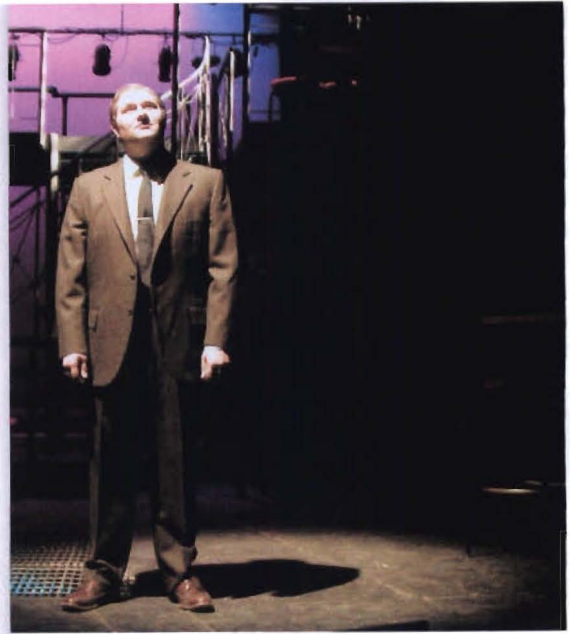


Fraulein Kost
Act 1 Sc 13





CABARET



CABARET



Costume List

Cliff (Curtis Becht)

Brown suit
White dress shirt
White t-shirt
Tan sweater vest
Brown tie
Overcoat
Brown shoes
Brown socks
Watch

Ernst (Justin Brown)

#1 Traveling (1-2)

Warm grey suit
Suspenders (throughout)
Overcoat
Grey hat
White dress shirt
White t-shirt (throughout)
Olive striped tie
Black shoes (throughout)
Black socks (throughout)
Watch (throughout)

#2 Lesson (1-6)

Light grey suit
Grey tie
Black hat
Same shirts
Same shoes/socks
Same overcoat

#3 Job Offer (1-10)

Repeat of 1-2

#4 Party (1-13)

Dark grey suit
Yellow stripe tie
Same shirts
Same shoes/socks
Same overcoat
Nazi armband

#5 Club (2-5)

Navy pants
Navy vest
Light grey tie
Same shirts
Same shoes/socks

#6 End scene (2-7)

Repeat of 1-13
Grey shirt instead of white

Herr Shultz (Matt Domasica)

#1 New Years Eve (1-3)

Brown pants
Brown sweater vest
White dress shirt
White t-shirt (throughout)
Brown tie
Brown shoes
Brown socks
Suspenders

#2 Pineapple (1-8)

Brown suit
Navy tie
Same shirts
Suspenders
Same shoes/socks

#3 Party (1-13)

1-8 suit without jacket

#4 Marriage reprise (2-2)

Same as 1-3

#5 Leaving (2-6)

Grey pants
Navy sweater vest
Tie
Overcoat
Same shirts
Black shoes
Black socks

#6 End scene (2-7)

2-6 without coat, change to grey shirt

Sally (Amber Rees)

#1 Opening (1-1)

Gold dress

Hose (throughout)

Gold shoes

#2 Don't Tell Mama (1-4)

Heidi Ho

#3 Meeting Cliff (1-5)

Robe

#4 Moving in (1-6)

Blue dress

Fur coat

Black character shoes

Black purse

Blue beaded necklace

#5 Pregnant (1-10)

Crème dress

Two-tone shoes

Pearl necklace

Fur coat

#6 Planning party (1-12)

Dress for next scene under fur coat

#7 Party (1-13)

Green dress

T-strap beige shoes

#8 First fight (2-4)

Purple dress

Purple shoes

Purple beads

Fur coat

#9 Club (2-5)

Robe

#10 Cabaret (2-5)

Red lace dress

Red shoes

#11 Goodbye (2-6)

Tan dress
Tan heels

Fraulein Schneider (Katie Clark)

#1 New Years Eve (1-3)

Rust dress
Hose (throughout)
Rust shoes

#2 Visitor (1-6)

Robe
Slippers

#3 Pineapple (1-8)

Yellow dress
Rust shoes

#4 Party (1-13)

Peach dress
Beige shoes

#5 Married reprise (2-2)

Brown dress
Rust shoes

#6 End scene (2-7)

Grey dress
Black shoes

Fraulein Kost (Kate Ponzio)

General

Teal robe
Slippers

#2 Party (1-13) & (2-7)

Dark blue-grey dress
Black character shoes
Black beads
Coat

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